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BILL NO.: **SB 129**

TITLE: Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program

SPONSOR: Senator Hettleman

COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

DATE: February 3, 2022

Baltimore County **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 129 – Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program. This legislation would ensure that immigrants who are subject to removal from the United States are be provided with legal representation in certain cases and create a fund to establish this program.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on immigrant communities across the state. The inaccessibility of financial and legal resources, along with language barriers, has made life extremely difficult for many immigrants during an already challenging time. Realizing this challenge, Baltimore County Executive John Olszewski created the county’s first immigration affairs coordinator position in the Office of Community Engagement. The role was recently filled by Giuliana Valencia-Banks. Since taking this position, Ms. Valencia-Banks has helped the county provide essential assistance to our immigrant population.

Creating a system in which immigrants have access to legal representation across the state would ease some of the hardships faced by this community. Under this bill, immigrants who are detained and subject to removal from the state would be provided legal counsel. SB 129 helps to ensure that all those living in Maryland are afforded the same legal rights regardless of immigration status.

Accordingly, Baltimore County requests a **FAVORABLE** report on Senate Bill 129, Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program. For more information, please contact Joel Beller, Acting Director of Government Affairs at jbeller@baltimorecountymd.gov.